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Seniors and West Nile Virus

All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been confirmed can be at risk, but people over age 50 seem to be especially vulnerable to the most severe symptoms and are also more likely to die from the disease.

Even in areas where the virus is circulating, very few mosquitoes are infected with the virus. Even if a mosquito is infected, less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. The chances you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite are extremely small.

However, more than half the deaths from West Nile Fever have occurred to adults over the age of 70. Most people suffering severe symptoms of West Nile Fever are over the age of 50. Seniors should be especially careful to avoid exposure.

The West Nile virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. The mosquitoes can then pass the virus to humans when they bite.

West Nile virus can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and/or meningitis (inflammation of the brain's lining). However, most infections are mild and symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, and occasionally include skin rashes or swollen lymph nodes. Symptoms generally appear 3 to 14 days after exposure.

More severe symptoms may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness or convulsions. Persons with these symptoms need to seek medical attention immediately. In rare cases, it can be fatal.

Mosquito Prevention Tips

Mosquitoes lay eggs in still water, which hatch in 7 to 10 days. If standing water is eliminated weekly, many mosquitoes will be kept from breeding in the first place. Here are some things you can do:

- Remove standing water in ponds, ditches, clogged rain gutters, flower pots, plant saucers, puddles, buckets, garden equipment and cans.
- Check for items that might hold water including toys, pool covers, tarps, plastic garden sheeting, boats, canoes and trash. i> Avoid mosquitoes by staying indoors at dawn and dusk when the bugs are most active.

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- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants while outdoors.
- **Apply insect repellent that contains DEET.** Follow directions carefully.

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